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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: PULP MILL PROTESTS UPDATE

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: A group of Argentine pulp mill protesters (asambleistas), piqueteros, and various other leftist groups demonstrated January 12 in Buenos Aires for the first time against the paper mill under construction by Finnish firm Botnia in neighboring Uruguay. Some of the demonstrators marched to the Port Terminal in Buenos Aires, shouting demands that President Kirchner call for the relocation of the plant. Though the planned blockage of ferry service was not effective, protesters claim they will continue to demonstrate in Buenos Aires until the situation is resolved and plan to block for an undetermined period three bridges along routes into Uruguay beginning to afternoon of January 12. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Argentine protesters against the construction of pulp mills on the Uruguay shore of the Rio Uruguay, who have periodically blocked road and bridge access to Uruguay over the past three years, have widened their protests in recent weeks to include Buenos Aires and have recruited other protest groups to join their cause. On January 12, they announced plans to block the departure of all ferry boats from Buenos Aires to Uruguay, with threats of thousands of demonstrators. Local police in Puerto Madero, where the ferry terminal is located, estimate the number of protesters on January 12 between five and six hundred, while the organizers place the number of participants as high as 2000. Despite heightened security, no altercations with demonstrators occurred, and tourists wishing to travel to Uruguay on the Buquebus ferry service met no resistance during today's protests. Claudio Merelas, spokesperson for Buquebus, reported in the press that all ferries left according to schedule, and Minister of the Interior Anibal Fernandez assured the press that alternative routes available to travelers will allow them to arrive at their destinations without complication.

¶3. (U) The protesters claim that they will continue to demonstrate in Buenos Aires until the situation is resolved and reaffirmed January 12 in the press plans to block three bridges (Gualedaychu Colon, and Concordia) along routes into Uruguay the same afternoon. A demonstration is also planned on the General San Martin international bridge connecting Gualedaychu and Fray Bentos, Uruguay. Local assemblies in Colon and Concordia plan to meet today to better define the nature and extent of future blockades, which have been raised off and on for over three years.

¶5. (U) The numbers of protesters now involved with the blocking of the Buquebus ferry terminals and the international bridges and land routes into Uruguay indicate that the asambleistas are being supplemented by leftist protester groups in Argentina, as press reports said. The

groups who have so far publicly agreed to help block the Buquebus are: piquetero group Polo Obrero run by Nestor Pitrola, students from the University of Buenos Aires Federation (FUBA), the communist piquetero group Classist and Combative Current (CCC) run by Juan Carlos Alderet, and the communist group United Left (Izquierda Unida) run by Vilma Ripoll.

16. (C) COMMENT: Although the recent protests have not resulted in a major inconvenience, this is the first time that the assembleistas have tried to bring their protests to the capital. The protests have remained nonviolent so far, but concerns are beginning to be raised about their persistent and increasingly confrontational nature. The addition of leftist piquetero groups, some of which have resorted to violence in the past, also suggests that the tone of the protests could change suddenly and without warning. The Finnish Embassy is reviewing security measures to address the issue of potential demonstrations. Pulp mill protests in Buenos Aires could turn out to be a new long-term issue in the capital, especially with the assistance of FUBA, who successfully prevented the election of a new rector and hampered normal activity at the largest university in the country for eight months. END COMMENT.
WAYNE